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Expanded School Wellness Program Arrives in Calhoun County

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The Calhoun county Public Health Department (CCPHD) is pleased to announce the long awaited arrival of the expanded School Wellness Program (SWP) in Calhoun County. With continued support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, United Way of Greater Battle Creek, the Battle Creek community Foundation, and various other supporters, the CCPHD is able to fulfill its goal of providing all school-age children access to quality health care through school-based health services.

The School Wellness Program is a specialized practice of professional nursing that advances the well-being, academic, and life-long achievement of students within our public schools. The SWP provides a community-based, family-centered, prevention-oriented service promoting the health and well-being of school-aged children. The objective of the school nurse is to build and maintain a healthy school community by implementing strategies that promote student and staff health and safety, thereby improving the likelihood that students are both physically and emotionally prepared for school.

The school nurse provides education to students and staff on topics such as proper handwashing, good hygiene, and nutrition. The provision of this education to students and staff helps nurses minimize the spread of contagious diseases and keeps the students healthy, maximizing the potential for learning. The school nurse also provides follow-up care to reduce the number of absences, thereby increasing the amount of instructional time for students.

The current Nurse/Student ratio in Calhoun County is approximately 1:4,200. The National Association of School Nurses recommends a ratio of 1 nurse for every 750 students. According to a 2009 National Association of School Nurses Survey, Michigan ranked the worst (50th) in the nation for student to school nurse ratios.

While it is recognized that there are not enough resources to assure that the student to nurse ratio is 1:750, the CCPHD was able to hire additional nurses to dramatically improve the current ratio. In addition, the CCPHD is collaborating with Kellogg Community College to incorporate nursing students into the SWP. The benefit of this collaborative initiative not only provides more healthcare within the schools, it serves as a valuable learning experience for soon-to-be graduated nursing students, some of which may enter the field of school nursing.

“We are extremely excited about these enhancements to the School Wellness Program in Calhoun County,” states Jim Rutherford, the Health Officer at the Calhoun County Public Health Department. “We have been working with a lot of different stakeholders within the community over the past three years. The local and state funds allowed us the opportunity to fully implement the enhancements to this program this fall.” It is recognized that there are an

increasing number of school-age children that do not have access to basic health care. This coupled with the fact that kids today face a whole list of complex health issues such as, obesity, diabetes and asthma makes this program essential to our community.

The intent of the program is to provide access to quality health care for all Calhoun County students ultimately reducing chronic disease rates and providing a greater learning experience and increasing the success of the students within the system. By providing a comprehensive SWP, learning time will increase by decreasing the number of students sent home unnecessarily and decreasing the number of absences due to illness. The program will also increase educational sessions provided to students and staff and increase county immunization efficiencies.

In addition, by improving attendance rates and decreasing the number of students sent home without being assessed by a nurse will improve test scores, decrease chronic disease rates, and improve healthy lifestyles. To increase immunization efficiencies, identified insured and uninsured students will be given needed vaccinations.